

Items #31, # 32 and #33: Timber Production

Evaluation Question: How did timber sale outputs compare with Forest plan estimates?
How did acres of timber harvest compare with projections?

Method:

- Total offered volume by year
- Total sold volume by year
- Total harvested volume by year
- Acres of harvest by year

Method Evaluation:

- Volumes obtained from standard Northern Region Timber Sale Statistics report, on intranet site: <http://fsweb.r1.fs.fed.us/forest/sales/reports/index.html>
- Volumes combine green and salvage volumes
- R1 Standard report, Acres Harvest by Cutting Method

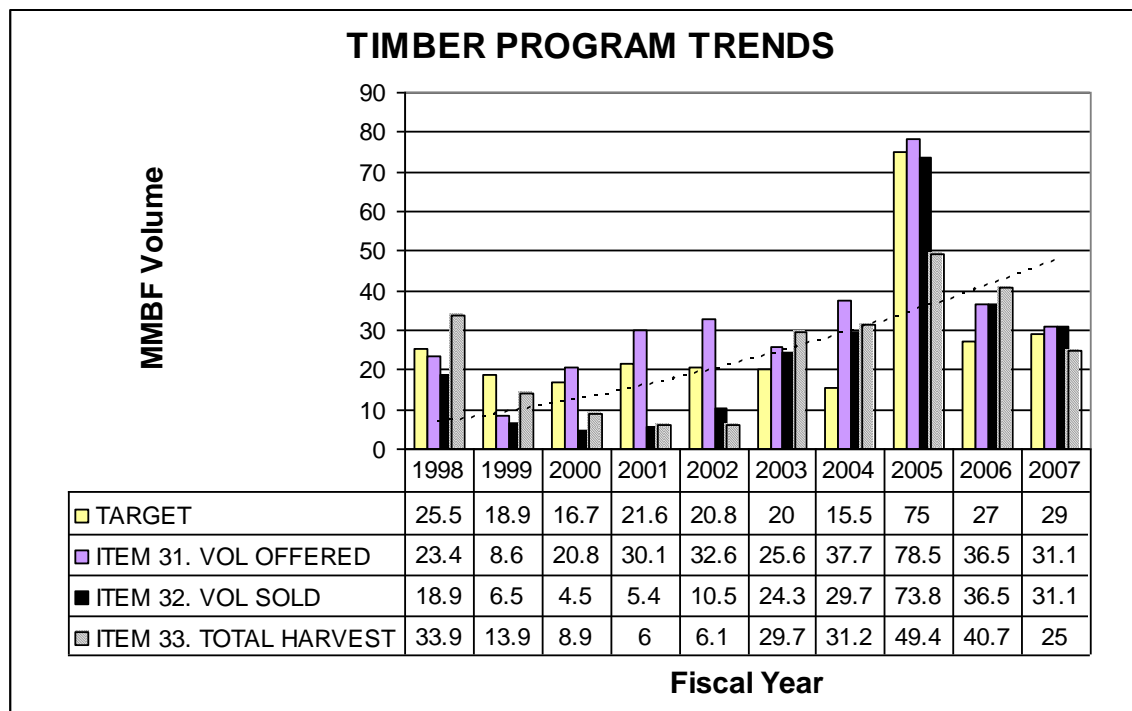


Figure 1: Timber Program Trends from 1998 to 2007

The funded timber program was relatively stable over the monitoring timeframe, with the exception of a significant increase in 2005 to address fire salvage after fires of 2003. This increase is reflected above in the large increase in target, volume offered, and volume sold in 2005, and volume harvested in 2005 and 2006.

The funded timber target in this timeframe averaged 26.7 MMBF. Volume offered exceeded the target, with an average of 32.6MMBF. Volume sold averaged 23.3 MMBF. If the year 2005,

(which corresponds to the majority of fire salvage) is excluded, the average funded timber target is 20.7 MMBF, the volume offered averages 26.9 MMBF, and the volume sold averages 17 MMBF. The forest intends to stabilize the volume offered at a level of 25-30 MMBF, funding permitting.

Volume offered for sale exceeded the target in 7 of 9 years, however volume sold lagged behind in the beginning of this monitoring period, only exceeding the target during 3 of the last 4 years. The reason for this is that a number of sales were offered, but did not sell during the period from 1999 to 2002. Most of these sales were re-offered in a later fiscal year, and sold, but are not reflected in the numbers above.

The original 1986 Forest Plan projections of sale program was 70 – 130 MMBF per year. As amended, the Forest Plan currently has an allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of 54 MMBF, with harvest levels projected at 20-30 MMBF per year, if budgets remain stable (Amendment 21 FEIS, 1998).

Through the period of 1998-2000, funding levels and the associated targets were substantially below the ASQ. Volume offered reached a low point in 1999 at 8.6 MMBF. This was due to numerous factors, including rapidly decreasing budgets and reduced staffing, increasing appeal and legal challenges of timber sale planning documents, loss of categorical exclusion authority for small timber sales, and increased planning complexity and associated costs.

Since 2000 the trend has been towards the Forest Plan projection of 20-30 MMBF, with this range exceeded in 2004 and 2005 because of fire salvage sales.

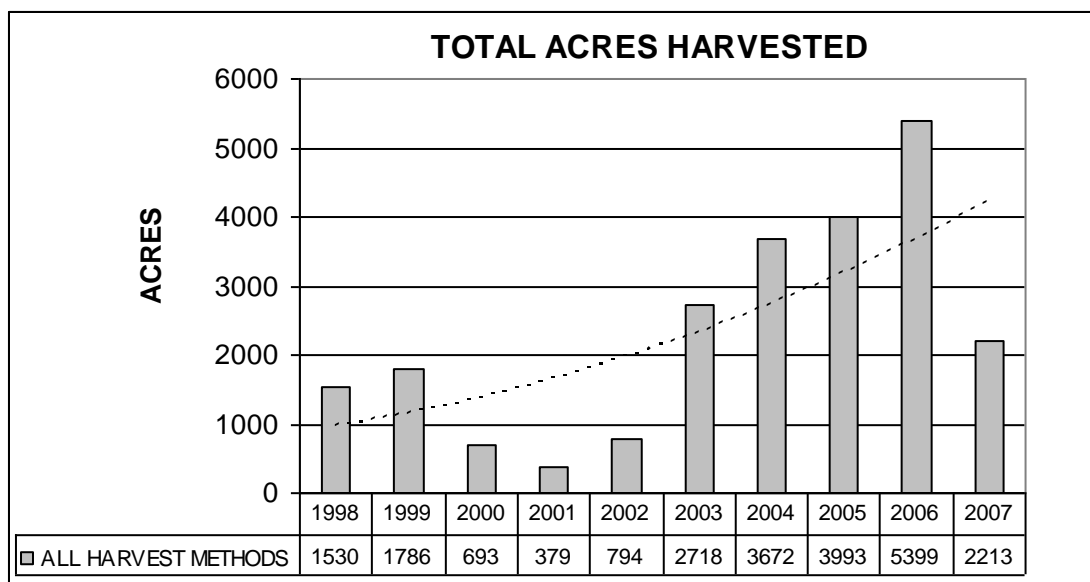


Figure 2: Total Acres Harvested on the Flathead National Forest from 1998 to 2007

Acres harvested annually to meet all resource objectives, averages 3599 for the decade. The 1986 Forest Plan projected an average of 9100 ac/year harvest (6600 acres regeneration plus 2500 acres intermediate harvest). As amended with A21 in 1999, the plan projected treatments through

2001, with an average of 9000 ac of harvest (2500 ac old-growth restoration plus 2500 ac regeneration of lodgepole pine types plus 4000 acres of intermediate harvest). Through 2006, none of the projected old-growth treatment has occurred. Such treatments remain controversial, and only one sale, sold in 2006 and not yet harvested, addresses this restoration objective.

Reasons for the overall shortfalls in acreage harvested are generally the same as described above for volume. In addition, the national priority on reduction of high fuel loads in and around communities has taken some precedence over the old-growth restoration emphasis which was projected for a 3 year period in 1999 with amendment 21.

Overall, timber management activity is occurring on significantly less of the national forest than the Forest Plan projected on an annual basis. At the same time, fire is playing a greater role than projected, causing additional vegetative change. These two factors together have resulted in an average change of 2% of the Flathead forest annually over the last five years. (timber = 0.1%)

Refer to items 34 and 35 below for further discussion of harvest trend.

Recommended Actions: Continue to monitor trends. Appropriate level of vegetation management will be re-addressed during forest plan revision. At that time, further integrate consideration of the role of both fire and timber harvest in causing vegetative change